

[Mrs. R. L. Dunman]

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Range-lore

Elizabeth Doyle

San Angelo, Texas.

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RANGE-LORE

Mrs. R. L. Dunman of Coleman, Texas, was born in Liberty County, Texas in 1848 and has been a native of the state for 90 years. Her husband was the owner of the D & O H ranch, one of the largest in the state. He brought to this country the famous Double Fleur de Lis (Lily of France) brand and was the fiction character in Walter Gann's late novel, "The Trail Boss". His ranch which covered a large portion of the territory between San Angelo and Coleman, was the setting and Mrs. Dunman was recently presented with an autographed copy of one of the first printed.

"Well I've been here ninety years," chuckled Mrs. Dunman, and her brown eyes twinkled youthfully as she continued. "I tell my friends sometimes that ninety years is too long a time but they are kind enough to tell me they wish I could live ninety more.

"I knew General Sam Houston when Texas and I were both quite young. C12 - 2/11/41 - Texas 2 He would stop with his negro servant and visit with my uncle, Amos Barber, who lived near the big hill in Liberty County which bears his name and which is now the site

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of the famous Barber Hill oil field. He gave my uncle some of his many books and a table with folding leaves which is still in the family.

"My father, T. J. Winfree died when I was one year old and half of every thing he had, land, negroes, cattle and horses, became mine.

"I was 12 years old when the Civil War broke out and I married the year it closed. I never had an oil lamp in my home until 1869. In the fall I would mould and put away the supply of tallow candles. One year I remember fixing twelve dozen.

"In 1879 we came to Coleman County with 2,000 head of steers. The two children and I rode in a hack, always keeping within reach of the riders in case something went wrong. We tried to keep far enough ahead to select the campsites. The first night out on the trail we put the negro boy, who drove my hack, out to watch the horses. He wasn't very dependable, so as he watched the horses I watched him. After awhile Mike, our Irish horse wrangler, went on watch and we all went to sleep. Next morning there was no Mike and the horses were also gone. The men found the horses fifteen miles back the trail toward home and Mike had gone three miles back to Pleasantown and got 3 drunk. He came [straggling?] into camps that evening looking very sheepish but Mr. Dunman did not give him the scolding that he probably expected. We needed him pretty badly so nothing was said and the caravan moved on toward Brady Mountains. Our household goods were hauled in old Chihuahau, a gigantic old freight wagon. The old high wheeler was given this name because it had been used during the Civil War to haul freight out of Old Mexico. While the historic old wagon was lumbering along with the herd, we got on the wrong road and was wandering over the mountainous Devil's River country when my husband overtook us, riding hard. 'Where do you think you are going?' he shouted. 'We must be crossing the Alps,' I replied. We were seven miles off the trail and lost.

"As we crossed the Brady Mountains I saw the trail followed by the Indians who raided Bluntzer's ranch and killed his Mexican sheep herder. I didn't sleep that night but the

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Indians had done their worst in these parts and we made our destination undisturbed. When we reached Coleman City I chose the present home site and have lived on it 58 years.

"My husband's ranch covered 400 square miles and lay between the Brady Mountains and the Colorado River. The cowboys pronounced our brand, Double Flower-du Loose and it was made like this . Here is a copy of the old 4 original branding iron. I had my son put that little shelf right up here by the front door to keep it on, so it would be handy when so many ask to see it. It was known from the Pecan Bayou to the Pecos from 1873 to 1890. The Fleur de Lis (meaning Lily of France) had its origin in the French ancestry of my father's family. Later it was used on the horses only and the cattle were branded with a D on the side and O H on the hip, thus the ranch became known as the D & O H ranch.

"The old house is still standing in Elmer Whitfield's pasture and is surrounded by many fond memories as well as mystery. The old rock commissary by its side which was used for supplies and to stow away the cow hands who partook too freely of the jug at the big ranch dances, stands almost intact, seemingly as good as when it was built.

"The mystery I refer to has to do with the murder of one John Bryson who later owned the ranch and was found shot to death in his bed in the east room.

"For sometime there were no fences but when a fence did finally go around our ranch in 1888 there was a lot of comment on the distance between the gates. The south one was at Salt Gap, the east one Stacy, the north one fifteen miles below Ballinger, and the one on the west side at Point Rock.

"Those were the days when you had to fight to hold your own in more ways than one. It was ride and ride 5 hard, sometimes day and night. Men would be sent out on what was termed outside work and often be away six months, working with outside wagons around

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water holes and lakes, throwing cattle back toward the headquarters ranch. They would sometimes wander 250 miles up and down the river.

“My husband sold his first ranch to the Concho Cattle Company. The deal was made in Dallas and the payment made, not in check but in cash. I remember how he lay awake nights wondering what to do with all that money. I wanted him to put it out on interest and live an easier life but not my husband- no easy going for him. 'I'm too young to retire,' he said, and went to the Indian Territory and bought a ranch which he later sold to a northern buyer for 400,000.00. He took life a little easier before he died but he was like I am now, he believed in being up and at it if there was anything to do. Why I can still do more then a lot of these younger women and I manage to keep busy at something every day.” Range-lore

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Mrs. R. L. Dunman, Coleman, Texas, interviewed, November 17, 1937.